

WHY NOT A CAMPAIGN FOR NATIONAL LEADERSHIP?

By George C. Roche III

Editor's Preview: For all her celebrities, contemporary America has few real heroes; for all her politicians and anchormen, too few leaders. Can ordinary citizens like you and me do anything to fill this vacuum?

We can do everything needed, argues George Roche, president of Hillsdale College and the Shavano Institute—and we must or no one will.

Meeting our obligation of leadership requires us to (1) realize that ideas, not armies, rule the world; (2) accept individual responsibility; (3) strengthen the moral and spiritual foundations of conduct; (4) learn history's lessons and apply them.

The American success story demonstrates what free men as leaders can accomplish, historian Roche observes. The collapse of Rome, with its uncomfortable parallels to our own times, shows where the other path leads.

If the time has in fact come to launch some kind of campaign for national leadership, free institutions like Hillsdale and Shavano can play a part—and are doing so, in capital letters. But the campaign must center on self-transcending individuals. "Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty," Paul wrote. Is the Spirit here?

This is a time of extraordinary flux in which the dominant patterns of ideas and the institutional structures of our society are undergoing major change.

In politics, the collectivist myth is collapsing. Technology is making enormous changes in our society. New economic patterns are forming, and we must be prepared for a different kind of foreign competition than we have seen in the past.

On the educational front we are facing a crisis in the public educational structure as we have known it,



partially through a growing lack of discipline and direction, but also, leaving aside all philosophic questions, through a funding failure.

Overall, we have two choices. We can play a part in guiding the formation and direction of the new world that is emerging, or we can simply stand where we are and be overrun.

There has never been a generation in the history of this country which has had such an enormous opportunity to make a clear choice and to have a hand in implementing that choice.

We are not just talking about a better way to run the country and our institutions. We are talking about whether or not there is going to be a country as we know it ten or twenty years hence.

Leadership is the issue before the house. When we get behind all the economic and political analysis, we finally recognize that the real problem in this social order of ours is that there are not enough leaders to stand

im•primis (im-pry-mis) adv. In the first place, from Latin *in primis*, among the first things...

Imprimis is the journal of Hillsdale's two outreach programs seeking to foster clear thinking on the problems of our time: the Center for Constructive Alternatives in Michigan and the Shavano Institute for National Leadership in Colorado. A subscription is free on request.

out in front and do the various jobs which need to be done. More important, the basic qualifications of being good leaders, the character traits that make us successful as leaders or as followers, are increasingly eroded in our social order. Today when someone gets out front and expresses a willingness to lead, the first thing our society tries to do is tear that leader down. This nation has moved a long way from the idea of the hero, the genuine leader. Our task is somehow to restore the idea of the leader.

Hillsdale College and the Shavano Institute have taken up this task in an increasing variety of ways over the years. The urgency we feel about America's need for leadership, and the wide array of educational and outreach activities we are carrying on to help meet that need, really add up to a sort of permanent campaign. We have found that it helps people understand the seriousness of our purpose if we use exactly that term, and in capital letters: the Campaign for National Leadership.

Both for our students and for a growing national audience, Hillsdale and Shavano seek to offer practical answers to the problems of our time, plus an insight into the moral understanding necessary to apply those answers. People not only need to know what to do, they also need to feel that they are the kind of people who in fact can undertake the task.

The list of potential leaders is a long one—all of us in our own way are leaders in various walks of life. There are also specialized leadership roles that we hope to encourage—the teacher, the writer, the businessman both with his own employees and as a member of the

general community, the broadcaster, the political activist. We want to reach each of those leadership audiences and, as we do, we want to provide the proper tools for use in their various centers of influence.

Four Fundamentals

But we will not be able to do that job unless we look at leadership in a much more fundamental way, at once more personal and more compelling. Let me make a few suggestions in regard to that deeper meaning of leadership:

One: Understand that ideas rule the world—not armies, not economics, not politics, not any of those other things to which we usually give our allegiance, but ideas. All those Napoleons and all the mighty of the earth are usually dancing to the tune provided by the dominant ideas of the leadership community in which they happen to find themselves. Understanding that fact saves us, I think, from going off on quite a few false tangents of one kind or another.

Two: I submit to you that you cannot delegate your leadership responsibility to anyone else. My old mentor and boss in New York at the Foundation for Economic Education, the late Leonard Read, used to say, "There are some things we should not turn over to others. There are matters which require strictly personal attention. For instance, we should not turn our religion over to others, nor our integrity, nor our conscience." Each of us, then, has to face individual responsibility. We have to attract others to the cause as well, it is true. But no matter how many people you bring into it, no matter what a crowd scene it becomes, the fundamental point to remember is that you can never give that responsibility away which you yourself must somehow discharge.

Three: We have to recognize that our political, economic, and social problems have a common moral and spiritual root. If we are to function as genuine leaders, we have to understand that our real strength, our real ability to offer and implement solutions to our confused world, must be based upon that moral and spiritual premise. Another one of my old favorites, Canon Bernard Iddings Bell, late of Chicago, put it this way: "Our present difficulties are so great and so basic as to demand nothing short of revolution, not so much political revolution or economic revolution as moral revolution—a revolution in estimate and pursuit of values."

Four: If you are going to be a leader, I ask that you understand the past. Consider two historic examples in which the actual working of the social order reflected the lessons we urge at Hillsdale and Shavano.

First, consider the American success story. The ancestors most of us, mine included, came here from nineteenth-century Europe. They came from societies strangled by an excess of regulation in which little or no upward mobility was possible, faced with rigidly enforced class systems, with most economic activity

About George C. Roche III

George Roche, not yet fifty, has been campaigning to restore moral leadership in America since Eisenhower's time.

The Colorado native has been a Marine officer, a teacher in a country high school, a college professor, director of seminars at the Foundation for Economic Education, a Senate candidate and nationally known speaker, a widely published author and historian of liberty, an education adviser to President Reagan.

Dr. Roche became the eleventh president of Hillsdale College in 1971, establishing the Center for Constructive Alternatives and *Imprimis* the same year. Other elements of what Hillsdale now calls its Campaign for National Leadership were put in place in the 1970s as Dr. Roche led the College's long fight for independence from federal control (currently before the U.S. Supreme Court) and in the 1980s with his founding of the Shavano Institute and the "Counterpoint" television series.

This issue of *Imprimis* was adapted from George Roche's address at Hillsdale's commencement ceremony on May 14, 1983, and from his concluding talk to some forty business leaders attending a Shavano seminar in the Rockies on June 28, 1983.

restricted by political power. In country after country, people were fleeing such a stifling atmosphere to come to a place they called "the land of opportunity." Because here in America, coming at great difficulty and great risk to an absolutely new experience—tearing up all the family roots, risking everything in the process—these people were coming to a new beginning in freedom and prosperity.

America's Rise and Rome's Fall

And so they came, millions of them, flocking to a land where they would have a chance to do something about the condition of their own existence. And they produced the greatest material prosperity, the greatest success story, in the history of the world. They discovered that they could pass on to their children more than they themselves had enjoyed.

For as the years passed, the sturdy Roman Republic became the mighty Roman Empire. That solidly middle-class yeoman farmer who built Rome began to be squeezed out of existence. Taxation was driving him to the wall. A phenomenon called inflation, in case we think it is uniquely our own problem, was plaguing the Romans then too. The Roman coin was a denarius, a little silver coin about the size of a dime. And the emperors had a simple way to generate extra funds. Every time the coin came back through the treasury they snipped the edge off and sent it out slightly smaller. The clippings were melted down to make extra denarii and give the emperors extra spending money. This is a much simpler system than the Federal Reserve, but in the main it had the same effect. That is to say, there were more and more denarii chasing the same amount of goods. Prices rose and living standards fell.



This country became an exciting place to be, giving little people a chance to improve the condition of their own existence. But more important, it gave us the dignity of being freely choosing individuals. And I submit that we cannot understand our past or our future unless we understand that dignity and its moral and spiritual sources.

Still, don't be a chauvinist. Don't think this is a uniquely American experience. We have done a wonderful job with it. We are a fine case study when we let freedom work. But other people have been through both the ups and the downs, the successes and the failures that constitute the human condition. To prepare ourselves as leaders we must also learn what we can from some of those failures.

My other historical example, then, is ancient Rome. If you read about ancient Rome, you will find that they made a terrific success story out of the Roman Republic, based upon the yeoman farmer and the solid middle-class virtues—*pietas*, *veritas*, *gravitas*. But in reading Roman history you also get a sense very like today's newspaper, a *déjà vu* which says, "I saw that on the 6:00 o'clock news last night." There is something disturbingly familiar about the present American experience and the latter-day Roman experience.

In those same years we see a strong moral decline, a tendency toward faster music and stronger wine in a steadily mounting crescendo. If you didn't like your husband, you didn't get a divorce, you just slipped him a permanent mickey in his wine. And that was the moral tone of upper-class Rome in the latter days of the Empire.

On the other end of the social scale there was a growing proletariat. As people get taxed and inflated and driven out of useful activity and savings, they finally become a part of a great howling mob. Most Romans did. In those days it was bread and circuses. Now it's welfare and television. But essentially the same idea applies—people with no sense of direction, no sense of dignity, no place to go, no institutional structure to protect what they are doing, finding that they were totally at the mercy of whatever the dole provided on a given day.

In this way, the Romans became barbarians. The Roman people were being barbarized, while outside, just beyond the realm of the firelight, were those grinning faces of the other barbarians, waiting to step into the firelight as soon as the society collapsed. Inside, the people were no longer able to fend for themselves, having lost freedom and dignity. Outside, the barbarians

aited the end. A pessimist might say that's not terrible unlike the world today.

St. Augustine of Hippo

It was in that time that a man who lived through the later days of the Roman Empire made what I think is one of the most significant contributions to the thinking of the Western world. He epitomized the spirit which will always motivate Hillsdale and Shavano. He lived through the fall of the Roman Empire. He watched the Huns and the Goths and the Vandals and the Visigoths march down the Italian peninsula and snuff out civilized existence. On his deathbed in a little town in North Africa, he heard the tramp of those same barbarian feet as they marched in to get that last little outpost of civilization. He lived through hard times, and, like most people who are faced with a real challenge and who have something inside them to give to that challenge, he rose to the occasion.

As a young man he was wild and woolly and abusive. He pioneered in the development of most of the forms of civilization which today are regarded as standard in Western civilization. He was an absolute hellion—there is no other word to describe him. However he found that vice was essentially a boring function, because vice is giving in to a lower side of human nature. Vice is reaching downward instead of reaching upward to some kind of accomplishment. The satisfaction, the completion of the human condition, just isn't there.

Eventually, then, he began to look for something more fulfilling. He found it in a rising religious sect, the Christian Church. He found himself more and more immersed in the Church. He began to give of his enormous talent and ability. Eventually he was made bishop of that area in North Africa surrounding his little town of Hippo. Today we regard him as one of the Church fathers, one of the primary formulators of Christian dogma as we know it. I am speaking, of course, of the Eagle of Hippo, St. Augustine.

St. Augustine developed, in his time of crisis, one of the most profound ideas which ever motivated Western civilization. The idea is derived from one question: What is it that makes man different from every other animal on this planet? He found the answer in one word—the root assumption under which we govern all of our personal and institutional lives—one long hyphenated word, SELF-TRANSCENDENCE.

Self-transcendence is the ability to rise above the merely animal, merely physical self, and freely choose the conditions and terms of your own existence, to decide what is of ultimate importance and act upon it whether or not other people understand, whether or not it makes you rich, whether or not it's dangerous. Only human beings have that capacity. Only you and I do. We have that capacity to rise above our merely physical selves.

Would You Drink the Water?

Let me give you an instance of what I mean. Suppose you are in a lifeboat in the middle of the Atlantic Ocean with your spouse and young son. There is a grave shortage of water. You have probably enough water to get two people to the shore or to wait for help, but not enough for three. What would the man do in that situation? Many men would drink the water. The world is filled with slobs. Will all the men drink the water? I don't know. I don't even know for sure what I would do. I think that moral tests passed in advance smack of braggadocio. It's a lot easier to talk about what you are going to do than it is to do it. But I would like to think that there are some men, somewhere, who when faced with that situation would freely decide not to do the immediate short-term animal thing—which is to preserve that animal life as long as possible—but to freely choose another course. At such a moment, marching to a different drummer, such a person would transcend his merely physical self.

Don't think that self-transcendence happens just in life rafts or just in the middle of the Atlantic Ocean. It happens all the time.

If economic transactions were based on the immediate cave man rip-off—the idea that I want to grab all I can get, and I want to get it right now, and I will not honor any obligation that interferes with this—no long-term economic planning, no economic contract is possible. No investment, nothing like what we call a capital structure, could ever come into existence, unless contracts are honored. That necessitates self-transcending people, people willing to honor long-term commitments.

The same idea applies not just in economic pursuits. The family is based upon self-transcending behavior. All civilization and all morality ultimately are based upon the idea of moral choice within the individual mind, heart, and soul.

The moral and spiritual message I am describing is simultaneously the *end* and the *means to the end* of all civilized behavior. That is the leadership commitment we are discussing. Self-transcendence works when given a chance.

The power to choose, the civilizing force in being a freely choosing moral agent, is the realization that all civilization is based upon the integrity of the self-responsible individual, directed by a view of justice, of restraint, and of responsibility, stemming from the recognition that each of us is a child of God.

Responsibility to Our Creator

This view of man as an individual and in possession of a God-given soul, rather than a mere creature of society, is put very nicely in one sentence in St. Paul in his Second Letter to the Corinthians, "Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty." That's more than a chance

remark. It is the very essence of what we are discussing. Without that innermost knowledge that each of us has that responsibility to our Creator, without a government and an institutional structure which is responsive to allowing us to exercise that kind of self-responsibility, there can be no true civilization. That is the *sine qua non*. If we do not have that, we do not have anything. That is why we oppose communism abroad. That is why we oppose collectivism at home.

There was a time when this country of ours valued that idea. It placed its faith in the individual and the institutional structure giving form to our lives. And it is the erosion of that faith which today destroys us from within. I submit to you that unless we recover those moral and spiritual values, all the methods in the world to do something better economically, technologically, or socially are just so much spitting in the wind.

Each of us has to act like a leader if we want to be one. We must remember that most people are fundamentally decent most of the time. We must approach every action in which we choose to engage with the idea that we should never force anyone to do anything. It is not our job to break people's heads and make them better. Our job is to help them see the way to fulfill themselves. And you can't do that job unless you personally live the moral and spiritual life of a self-transcending person.

The minute you begin to do that, you will have influence beyond your wildest dreams. Others will seek you out because there will be something which will shine in you. So mend your own house.

We have all met such people. Something shines from them, something we want to learn more about. Whether that person is a colleague in your profession, a fellow student, a particular professor, a neighbor, when you make that kind of identification, you perceive it immediately. But you can't give away that inspiration until you have it yourself. And we all have our centers of influence. We all have our homes, our families, our friends, our churches, our students, our businesses, our professions. There are people who really care what we

think, people who really listen.

To Be a Self-Transcender

I want to repeat the key point: our goal is a society of freely choosing, self-transcending men and women, and our means of reaching that goal begins in being just such self-transcending individuals ourselves. We have to insist upon a return to a hierarchy of values which gives primacy to the dignity of the individual and to the institutional forms which guarantee that dignity.

It is here that the free market, private property, private institutions—that whole private sector idea—has special validity, because it does leave people free to build their own voluntary associations, to be uniquely self-transcending, to get on with the dignity of leading their own lives.

Remember, then, when we as leaders are talking about the private sector, that we are committed to this not because it works, though it works very well. All kinds of economic arguments demonstrate that the free market provides prosperity. It solves social problems. It works. But that is not the argument that we should advance. People are not inspired by the argument that they will have more refrigerators if they are free men. Our message must not be that the free market is good because it works, but rather that it works because it is good—because it has the fundamentally proper view of human nature.

What is your decision? Will you join Hillsdale and Shavano in this Campaign for National Leadership? Will you set about being more of a leader yourself, today, through the individual channels open to you? You will be working not for yourself, but for people who are going to come. As a self-transcender you reach back to your parents and beyond. You reach forward to your children and beyond.

The challenge before us is to start a revolution in moral understanding, a revolution to change the world. You can be a part of that revolution. "Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty." Is the Spirit here?



Hillsdale College is marked by its strong independence and its emphasis on academic excellence. It holds that the traditional values of Western civilization, especially including the free society of responsible individuals, are worthy of defense. In maintaining these values, the college has remained independent throughout its 139 years, neither soliciting nor accepting government funding for its operations.



The opinions expressed in *Imprimis* may be, but are not necessarily, the views of the Center for Constructive Alternatives, the Shavano Institute, or Hillsdale College. Copyright © 1983 by Hillsdale College. Permission to reprint in whole or in part is hereby granted, provided customary credit is given. ISSN 0277-8432. Editor, John K. Andrews, Jr.; Managing Editor, Peter C. McCarty; Assistant, Patricia A. Dubois.

